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NATURE NOW
World Bears Imprint Of Passage of Time

By Lydia King Frehe
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric.

Those of you who follow this column find frequent reference to the life of past ages. To comprehend such vast reaches of time requires a greater stretch of the imagination than most of us can command. Yet without some knowledge of the past the present is often blurred.

To understand time scientists of the world have dedicated themselves with a kind of fierce and selfless devotion. The paleontologist is one of these.

He studies the life of the geologic ages gone by. His days are given to investigating the fossil record and rock strata in which it is sealed, to reconstructing the life history of extinct plants and animals and to relating them to their proper places in the sequence of time.

When he correlates his findings with our knowledge of modern flora and fauna he has a true, though incomplete, picture of life's long upward climb.

THE GREEK scholars early pondered over the meaning of such fossil corals and shells as came to their hands, but it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that Cuvier, a French naturalist, founded the science of comparative anatomy. His studies led to the discovery that fossils of lower and earlier rocks differ from existing organisms more than those of recent or upper formations. As the knowledge of later scientific investigations was compiled, all of



Mrs. Frehe

time was divided into five great geologic periods, each with its own characteristic plant and animal types.

A million years is the geologist's rule for the measure of time. What to us is a staggering sum is to him a page in a book which he turns with a single unimpeded motion. Whatever he sets down he knows all too well will be a relative truth which may be replaced at any moment as new discoveries are made. It has been proven that as man's mind delves deeper and deeper into the past, the estimated age of the earth has gradually increased.

PRESENT calculations made from a study of the radioactivity of the oldest rocks place it somewhere between two and a half and four billion years. The geologic time-table must, therefore, be constantly revised, as knowledge grows and no man knows the percentage of error in our present tabulations.

An estimated time table of earth's history and its life trends is:

I. ARCHEOZOIC, 2500-2100 million years ago. The presence of single-celled plants and animals is inferred.

II. PROTEROZOIC, 2100-550 million years ago. Fossil algae and many-celled invertebrates. (Little is known of the life of the two above periods which comprise more than three-fourths of geologic time.)

III. PALEOZOIC, 550-200 million years ago. Plants progressed from algae through spore-bearing fern-like forms to primitive seed plants such as the ginkgo and cycad; animals from mollusks through amphibians to early reptiles.

IV. MESOZOIC, 200-60 million years ago. Plants progressed through early conifers to monocotyledons. Great reptilian birds rose and declined. Primitive birds and mammals appeared.

V. GENEZOIC, 60 million years ago to present time. Modern forests and flowering plants were established. This age saw the climax of mammals and the advent of man.

Some time during middle Paleozoic time, life left the ancient seas to colonize the land. During the last three geologic periods, plants spread over the bare and rocky continents to make a home for the diverse animal forms which followed. Any good historic geology will give details of the life of these ages. Even a cursory knowledge of the sequence of its many forms illuminates our present.

IT IS TO me a source of great satisfaction to hold in my hand a fossil coral and to be able to place it somewhere in the long sequence of the species which reaches from the ancient seas to our present coral reefs. Or to stand on a lonely

shore, fingering a bit of flotsam help, knowing the while its relationship to the mighty oak.

Or to hear, of a summer morn'g, the joyous song of the meadowlark, remembering that its first awkward relatives flew to safety over the heads of giant dinosaurs.

And most of all, I know how short is the time since the hand of man first began to bend nature's raw materials to his needs and uses. And how light it is to touch upon him and how indiscernible the individual motif that is first when seen from the vantage point of the ages that life's patterns stand out bold and clear.

In the end, time is a mystery, measured by the earth's revolutions around its parent sun. But we are susceptible to it. By it we shape our days and set our goals.

Time is like a moving stream, we put our hand into its waters, but it is not given to us to touch any particular part of its fluidity. In like manner, there is always something of the past and the future in that which we call the present.

Noted Anthropologist Scheduled to Discuss Fears, Superstitions

Fears and superstitions will be analyzed by Claudia DeLys, noted anthropologist, who will speak at Detroit Town Hall, Wednesday morning, Jan. 28, at 10 o'clock in Fisher theater.

Superstition expert, Claudia DeLys, has spent many years sifting the cobwebs off some 80,000 of the world's favorite phobias. Her best-selling book, "A Treasury of American Superstitions," explains why fear is always the underlying reason for these phobias.

The speaker is well known to radio and movie audiences. Her new television program, soon to appear on a major network, will present a panel of outstanding personalities on the subject of our customs and superstitions.

World-famous Sigmund Freud said of the anthropologist, "I've spent many fascinating hours with

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